

Book Review

Götz Keydana. *Infinitive im Ṛgveda: Formen, Funktion, Diachronie* (Brill's Studies in Indo-European Languages & Linguistics 9). Leiden: Brill, 2013, XIII + 393 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-24614-0. Hardback EUR 149,00/US\$ 203,00

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There can be little doubt that a comprehensive study and description of the so-called infinitives of the Vedic language is an urgent desideratum. The standard reference book in this field – the *Altindische Grammatik* founded by Jacob Wackernagel – has remained unfinished and has never seen the publication of a volume on the verb. This gap also affects the non-finite verb forms. Whereas a reliable monograph is available on the gerunds (absolutives, also called ‘converbs’ in the modern linguistic literature), viz. Bertil Tikkänen’s *The Sanskrit gerund* (Tikkänen 1987), the complex universe of the infinitives is still lacking a comparable counterpart. It is true that Petr Sgall’s *Die Infinitive im Ṛgveda* (Sgall 1958) represents a “beachtenswerten Gesamtüberblick über die vedischen Infinitive” (Schmid 1963: 204). Nevertheless, Sgall’s book does not go much beyond the works of his predecessors (B. Delbrück, E. Benveniste, L. Renou, etc.) and does not yet provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of the Vedic infinitives.

Under these circumstances it is most welcome that an excellent linguist and expert of the Ṛgveda like Götz Keydana took on the task. The book under review is a fully revised version of his Göttingen Habilitation thesis from 2003. On the whole it is an excellent book, which thoroughly penetrates the subject down to the finest ramifications and which carefully evaluates, classifies, and – where required – rebuts statements found in the secondary literature. It excels time and again with new ideas whose value is not easy to demonstrate here. It is certainly a great step forwards from older studies of the subject. If in this review a number of criticisms are raised this is not to be taken as a negative judgment but is meant as an antithesis in the context of scientific discourse.

The main part of the book consists of seven chapters. It is complemented by an appendix to chapter five, viz. a table of forms that Keydana assesses as not unambiguously encoded infinitives (“nicht eindeutig kodierte Infinitive”, pp. 339–368), a bibliography (pp. 369–384), an index locorum (pp. 385–389) and an index of authors and subjects (pp. 390–393).

Chapter 1, “Einführung” (pp. 1–23), first presents the problems of the subject on the basis of a short overview over the intricate history of research in the area.

A second part (pp. 14–23) deals with the modern syntactic formalism Keydana wishes to apply to the Ṛgveda, that is to say Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG), a relatively complex formal grammar and syntax model. It is an adverse side effect of our academic system that important topics are treated in qualification theses, where the focus is often on theoretical and methodological considerations and little attention is paid to future readers. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in Keydana's book. Explaining the motivations for his study, he names among other things (preface, p. IX.): "... [den] Wunsch..., moderne syntaktische Beschreibungssprachen auf altindogermanische Sprachen anzuwenden..." and "... [das] Bestreben, den Nutzen aktueller Syntaxforschung für das Studium antiker Sprachen zu demonstrieren und der indogermanistischen Syntax auf diese Weise neue Fragestellungen zu erschließen". It is a serious drawback that Keydana implements LFG throughout his book, thereby making it difficult for people who are not familiar with LFG to fathom the reasoning. Thus the circle of readers able to fully appreciate the book is probably relatively small. Of course one would be prepared to bear with all this if there were clear advantages on the other side, e.g. a better understanding of syntactic structures, an advancement in interpreting the Vedic text, or the emergence of new syntactic issues in the field of Vedic grammar. Given the complexity of the matter and the density of the material in the book, it is not easy to determine whether there are such advantages. My impression is, however, that a benefit to that effect is likely to be quite modest and that the application of LFG cannot contribute substantially to the decipherment of the difficult Vedic mantras.

Chapter 2 is entitled "Die Kategorie Infinitiv im Altindischen" (pp. 25–57). Here one would expect a transparent definition of the category of infinitive. Unfortunately, as is the case with earlier scholars of the subject, a serious problem of Keydana's work is that it does not become sufficiently clear what exactly should be understood by a Vedic infinitive. When trying to draw the distinction between infinitives and verbal abstracts – Ereignisnominalisierungen ("event nominalizations") in his terminology – Keydana relies mainly on syntactic criteria (verbal construction, pp. 47–57), but in addition morphological criteria (forms on *-tavāi*, *-ṣāṇi*, *-adhyai*, pp. 37–47) are used as well. With such mixed criteria, a satisfactory definition of the infinitive can hardly be reached.

In particular, the criterion of verbal construction, which has always been used for the identification of infinitives ("seit jeher zur Identifizierung von Infinitiven verwendet" p. 47), and which is consistently applied to the material of the Ṛgveda by Keydana, is completely unsuited to the purpose. The overvaluing of this factor runs like a red thread through the history of research on the Vedic formations traditionally called 'infinitive' and obscures matters. That verbal construction – i.e. specifically accusative government and the use of

adverbs in place of adjectives – is handed down in the process of nominalization from the underlying finite verb to the verbal abstract is a well-known phenomenon often observed in the languages of the world (cf. e.g. Schmid 1963: 202; Zehnder 2011a: 622–623). It does not prove the forms in question to be infinitives.

Due to the strict application of this criterion Keydana is forced on various occasions to identify forms as infinitives that have quite a different function:

- (1) RV 5.46.1c (*ná... vaśmi...*) *āvṛtam púnar* ‘(I do not wish...) the turn back’ (p. 275: “Das Adverb *púnar* sichert für *āvṛtam* die Infinitivlesart”). *Āvṛtam* is of course not an infinitive, but an ordinary verbal abstract in the accusative.
- (2) RV 3.54.18c *yuyóta no anapatyāni gántoḥ* ‘Keep us away from the going into childlessness.’ (p. 259: “ein Beleg, der den Ansatz eines Infinitivs auf *-toḥ* nahelegt”). *Gántoḥ* is a *tu*-abstract in the ablative governed by the verb *yav* ‘keep away (from)’ in spite of the dependent accusative of goal (cf. Lowe 2014: 265–266). It is no more an infinitive than all the other “ablative infinitives” (cf. pp. 76–78).
- (3) RV 1.164.4d *kó vidvāmsam úpa gāt práṣṭum etát* ‘Who goes to a knowing one (in order) to ask this?’ (p. 257). *Práṣṭum* is a verbal abstract in the accusative (adjunct of direction and purpose).

Chapter 3, “Semantik des altindischen Infinitivs” (pp. 59–78), and the extensive Chapter 4, “Syntax des altindischen Infinitivs” (pp. 79–185), deal with the functions Keydana attributes to the forms he has identified as infinitives in Chapter 2 and with the syntax of the sentences in which they occur respectively. Keydana distinguishes four different functions of infinitives in the Ṛgveda:

- 3.1 “Adjunkte Infinitive” (pp. 61–65 and 83–154)
- 3.2 “Infinitivkomplemente” (pp. 65–70 and chapter 6)
- 3.3 “Prädikative Infinitive” (pp. 70–72 and 154–171)
- 3.4 “Matrixinfinitive” (pp. 72–73 and 171–184)

Adjunct function (3.1.) refers to purpose (‘in order to’). This is not only the default function of the forms at issue, but in fact the only clearly recognizable one. The periphrastic causative and the gerundive-like construction (see below example (5)) are based on it. That is why I prefer to use the term ‘expressions of purpose’ (“finale Ausdrücke”) instead of ‘infinitives’.

True infinitives serving as complements (3.2.) do not exist at all in the older parts of the Veda in my opinion (see below on Chapter 6). There are indeed certain Vedic constructions in which expressions of purpose are compulsory components and therefore actants (cf. Zehnder 2011a: 628). The most prominent example of this is the periphrastic causative, which combines expressions of purpose with the

verb *kar* ‘make’. This category has received little attention up to now; it was described in broad outline by Jamison (1983: 38–39) and somewhat more extensively in a small monograph by myself (Zehnder 2011b; cf. the review by Jamison 2014). Keydana dismisses the existence of the periphrastic causative and classifies the corresponding expressions of purpose rather as factitive complements to the matrix predicate *kar* (3.2.1. “Faktitive Komplemente”, pp. 67–69). However, the causative value of the construction *kar* ‘make’ + expression of purpose is clearly demonstrated by two instances where it appears as a variant reading of a morphological causative in *-āya-* in a repeated mantra (cf. Zehnder 2011b: 2–3). One of the two instances is the following, where *kṛṇutha jīvase* appears in the Paippalāda recension of the Atharvaveda (4b) in place of *jīváyathā (púnaḥ)* of the Ṛgveda and the Śaunaka recension (4a):

- (4a) RV 10.137.1cd (≈ AVŚ 4.13.1cd): *utāgaś cakrúṣaṃ devā¹ dévā jīváyathā púnaḥ* ‘And the one who has committed a sin, O gods, him, O gods, you make live again.’
- (4b) AVP 5.18.1cd *uto mariṣyantaṃ devā¹ + daivāḥ kṛṇutha jīvase* ‘And the one who is about to die, O gods, divine ones, you make live.’

In my view, the periphrastic causative is a fixed analytical construction that has undergone grammaticalization (cf. Zehnder 2011b: 75) and contains an expression of purpose as a compulsory component. This non-finite component is by no means an infinitive serving as complement, but still retains a semantic value of purpose. Cross-linguistically, elements with a meaning of purpose are particularly typical as components of periphrastic causatives (cf. Song 2005: 447a).

Predicative function (3.3.) mainly refers to the gerundive-like construction, a periphrasis consisting of an expression of purpose and the copula (*as* or *zero*), which has a modal connotation of possibility or, less often, necessity. It occurs almost exclusively in negative sentences:

- (5) RV 10.14.2b *nāiṣā gávyūtir āpabhartavā u* ‘this pasture cannot be taken away (from us)’

In Chapter 5, “Nicht eindeutig kodierte Infinitive” (pp. 187–263), Keydana groups together what in his system are considered ‘not unequivocally encoded infinitives’. The first subsection, 5.1. (pp. 190–199), is about a small group of forms that can be analyzed as locatives of verbal abstracts. They include not reliably understandable forms such as RV 10.132.6b *pupūtāni* (p. 192). Much more space is covered, however, by subsection 5.2. (pp. 199–263), dealing mostly with forms that are synchronically analyzable as datives of verbal abstracts. Such dative forms are erroneously termed ‘infinitives’, viz. when they govern an accusative, e.g. RV 3.17.1d *yajáthāya devān* ‘in order to worship the gods’ (p. 261–262).

Chapter 6, “Infinitivkomplemente” (pp. 265–322), is crucial for the question of whether there are true infinitives in the Ṛgveda. Like most of the earlier scholars Keydana believes that this question is to be answered in the affirmative. This opinion is based on the assumption that there exist collocations of auxiliary verbs with non-finite verb forms that do not conform to the normal valency of the verb. An example of this is (6), where Keydana (p. 279) interprets the verb *vayⁱ* (*vémi*) as an auxiliary verb of the meaning ‘wollen’ (‘to want’) with two complements (*ṛñjāse* and *stótave*) in the dative form:

(6) RV 8.4.17ab *vémi tvā pūṣann ṛñjāse* ¹ *vémi stótava āghṛṇe*

Keydana: “Ich will, Pūṣan, dir zueilen, ich will dich preisen, du Glühender”

An overall examination of the instances of *vayⁱ* reveals, however, that it is more appropriate to analyze the sentence as containing a full verb ‘strive for’ with accusative *tvā* and two adjuncts of purpose (cf. Keydana p. 279, note 41): ‘I strive for you, Pūṣan, in order to address myself (to you); I strive (for you), in order to extol (you), O radiant (god).’ In a similar fashion, the evidence for infinitives serving as complement vanishes into thin air upon closer inspection until eventually only a few problematic cases remain. Among these, the verse RV 1.154.6a *tā vāṃ vāstūny uśmasi gāmadhyai* occupies a prominent place. Keydana interprets *gāmadhyai* as desiderative complement to the verb *uśmasi* ‘we wish, we desire’ (p. 274): “Zu diesen euren Wohnungen wünschen wir zu gehen.” (‘To these dwellings of yours we wish to go’). In contrast, my own proposal views *gāmadhyai* as an adjunct of purpose (Zehnder 2011a: 628): “Diese euer beider Wohnsitze begehren wir, um sie zu erlangen” (‘These dwellings of you two we desire in order to attain them.’). This interpretation finds support in the parallel statement of the preceding stanza: RV 1.154.5a *tād asya priyām abhī pātho aśyām* ‘Might I attain this shelter of his own’. Here the accusative *pāthaḥ* ‘shelter’, which is semantically parallel to *vāstūni* ‘dwellings’, is the direct object of a verb of obtaining as well – except that the wish is expressed by the optative mood (*aśyām*) instead of the verb *vaś* ‘wish’.

It is my conviction (cf. Zehnder 2011a: 627–629) that there are no “infinitives” serving as complements in the older, metrical parts of the Veda (Ṛgveda and mantra language). As for the Vedic infinitives serving as subject – only one case (RV 8.47.12) has ever been posited – Keydana admits that their existence cannot be proved with certainty (p. 162). And the alleged infinitives serving as object are either verbal abstracts in the accusative or – in the case of dative forms – they are adjuncts of purpose that have been misinterpreted. Their supposed matrix predicates are to be understood as full verbs and not as modal or auxiliary verbs (cf. e.g. Oettinger 2012: 250–251).

A decidedly better understanding of the forms in question arises in my view from the purely functional approach I myself have applied to the Vedic material (cf. Zehnder 2011a: 623–624), following a definition of the infinitive developed by Martin Haspelmath (1997: 62) in a typological context. According to this definition, infinitives are complements, that is to say they are syntactically indispensable actants (usually subject or object) expressing a state of affairs (Sachverhalt), which complement certain matrix predicates. My study yielded the result that there are no non-finite verb forms serving as complements in the older parts of the Veda and therefore no infinitives in the narrower sense at all.

The Vedic forms commonly termed infinitives are in fact usually optional adjuncts and thus should be classified as converbs of purpose according to Haspelmath's system (e.g. the forms in *-adhyai* and in *-tavái*). The concept of converbs is rarely used in works on Vedic grammar, although this language has a canonical case of converb, viz. the gerunds. This terminological inconsistency is partly responsible for the fact that the status of the forms at issue is often misunderstood, because the misleading term 'infinitive' is used instead. In my opinion, in place of a binary opposition 'infinitive versus verbal abstract in the dative of purpose' we are dealing rather with a continuum of expressions of purpose (Germ. 'finale Ausdrücke') with the two poles, (a) datives of synchronic verbal abstracts and (b) converbs of purpose.

Chapter 7, "Die diachrone Perspektive" (pp. 323–338) does not deal in the first place with the prehistory and the emergence of the supposed infinitives, but rather with their chronological layering within the Ṛgveda. Right at the end of the chapter (pp. 337–338), Keydana is talking about the Ṛgvedic form in *-tum* and its "Entwicklung hin zum klassischen Sanskrit". It is indeed a widely held view that the large diversity of infinitives of the Vedic language developed into the single infinitive in *-tum* in Classical Sanskrit. But this is probably not exactly what happened. Rather, a large diversity of expressions of purpose have been abandoned, while much later and independently the *tum*-infinitive has arisen in the Classical language (cf. Zehnder 2011a: 629–630). There is no diachronic path leading from the supposed Ṛgvedic forms to the classical infinitive in *-tum*, since the alleged matrix verbs like *vayⁱ* "want" (p. 279), (*út*) *harṣ* "be in the mood for" (p. 285), or *joṣ* "take pleasure in" (p. 288) are not constructed with infinitives in Epic and Classical Sanskrit.

To sum up: the book under review is an excellent work, which certainly provides important advances in the field of Vedic syntax. A multitude of issues related to the subject area in question are raised and competently evaluated. The high quality of the work, however, is not due in the first place to the application of a modern model of formal linguistic analysis (Lexical-Functional Grammar), but rather to the fact that the author is a superb linguist and philologist.

Keydana's studies are of an excellent standard and deserve high recognition. With regard to his results, it is possible to disagree in good conscience on various central points.

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